

# Esophageal Cancer Overview

## Esophageal Cancer Symptoms and Signs

Most people with esophageal cancer have symptoms that affect their ability to swallow.

Esophageal cancer causes the esophagus to become narrower. This can make it harder to swallow.

It can also cause a feeling of having something stuck in the throat or chest. Some people have choking sensations.

Some people may not notice any symptoms until the cancer is at an advanced stage.

In addition to swallowing troubles, common esophageal cancer symptoms may include:

- Appetite loss or trouble eating solid foods
- Bleeding in the esophagus
- Chest pain
- Coughing
- Fatigue
- Hiccups
- Hoarseness
- Overproduction of saliva
- Vomiting
- Weight loss

## Esophageal Cancer Risk Factors

Risk factors increase a person's chance of getting cancer. In some cases, people can change their habits or jobs to reduce or eliminate esophageal cancer risk factors.

Risk factors for esophageal cancer include:

- **Advanced age** — those 55 and older have a higher risk.
- **Gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD)** — men and women with GERD have a higher risk of developing adenocarcinoma of the esophagus. Risk increases based on how long and severe are the symptoms, such as reflux or heartburn.
- **Barrett's esophagus** — doctors link this disease with a higher risk of developing esophageal cancer. People with GERD have a higher risk for getting Barrett's esophagus.
- **Obesity** — men and women who are overweight or obese have a higher chance of getting esophageal cancer. People who are obese are more likely to have GERD.
- **Being male** — men are three times as likely to get esophageal cancer.
- **Tobacco exposure** — research has found that exposure to tobacco smoke causes esophageal cancer. Although the risk of getting esophageal cancer is greater for the smoker, secondhand smoke also can cause esophageal cancer in nonsmokers.
- **Injury of esophagus** — prior chemical or mechanical injury may increase the risk of esophageal cancer.

## Esophageal Cancer Diagnosis and Staging

Most diagnostic processes begin with a physical exam, a medical history, and a blood sample that goes to the lab for analysis.

Your doctor may order one or more of the following tests:

- **Esophagogastroduodenoscopy (EGD)** — this test involves the insertion of a flexible tube into the esophagus and stomach. Your doctor checks the tissues for cancer cells and guides a biopsy needle into the cancerous tissue.
- **Computed tomography (CT) scan** — this imaging exam combines x-rays with computer technology to produce detailed pictures of the esophagus.
- **Endoscopic ultrasound** — your doctor passes an endoscope with an ultrasound probe into the esophagus. This produces detailed pictures of the tissues surrounding the esophagus.
- **Positron emission tomography (PET) scan** — PET creates an image that reflects your body's biochemical activity. It uses a low level of radiation and a small amount of radioactive dye.

The type and stage of your esophageal cancer will help your care team design a **treatment plan** just for you.

**Staging** ensures that every member of the care team understands the exact type, size, location, and spread of the cancer. Your care team will conduct tests and procedures to classify the type and stage of your disease.

## Esophageal Cancer Prognosis and Outcomes

Aspirus Cancer Center doctors and Dr. Reising collaborate closely to develop your treatment plan.

With the support of their nurse team and dieticians and social worker they consider not just the stage or type of cancer but also factors that affect your total health.

Your prognosis will depend on many factors:

- Your diagnosis.
- Your overall health.
- How well your esophageal cancer care team expects your treatment plan to work.

We'll work at our highest level of expertise to achieve the best outcome possible.

## Esophageal Cancer Care and Treatment Program

People with esophageal cancer have access to state-of-the-art, evidence-based care at Aspirus Wausau Hospital and Cancer Center.

Our treatment program combines the skills of esophageal cancer doctors and other health care staff in an interdisciplinary and coordinated way.

Medical, radiation, and surgical specialists provide a complete continuum of care and the latest esophageal cancer therapies.

## Your Esophageal Cancer Treatment Plan

The type and stage of your esophageal cancer, along with other diagnostic data, will shape your treatment plan.

Your care team works with your referring doctor to design a plan for treating your esophageal cancer that might include:

- Surgery
- Chemotherapy
- Radiation
- Supportive care

## Esophageal Cancer Treatment Options

The surgical, radiation, and medical oncologists at Aspirus Cancer Center work with your referring doctor to decide the best treatment approaches for you.

Our multidisciplinary expertise and extensive experience are the foundation of a broad knowledge base that provides insight into each patient's unique case.

### Surgery for Esophageal Cancer

Your care team may suggest surgery when they know that they can remove your tumor.

Dr. Reising is an expert in minimally invasive and robotic surgical techniques to remove cancerous (malignant) and noncancerous (benign) tumors.

Surgical treatment for esophageal cancer often goes hand-in-hand with medical or radiation treatment for greater results.

For some people, surgery may present a higher risk. In these cases, your cancer care team may use radiofrequency ablation (RFA).

RFA involves the placement of a probe in the tumor through a needle catheter with CT guidance. Electrical heat energy travels through the probe to kill the cancer cells.

Dr. Reising will discuss your options with you after a thorough review of your diagnosis.

### Chemotherapy and Medical Oncology for Esophageal Cancer

Medical oncology for esophageal cancer involves the use of:

- Anti-cancer drugs
- Gene therapy
- Immunotherapy

Side effects vary with the type of treatment.

In many cases, your care team will combine medical oncology treatment with surgery or radiation therapy.

### Radiation Therapy for Esophageal Cancer

Radiation therapy varies depending on the type and stage of esophageal cancer.

Most radiation treatments use high-energy x-rays or concentrated radioactive materials to safely kill cancer cells.

Your doctors often pair radiation therapy with medical treatment for esophageal cancer.

## Esophageal Cancer Websites

The [National Cancer Institute](#) website provides esophageal cancer info for the public and health care professionals. Read about esophageal cancer treatment, supportive care, clinical trials, and much more.